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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000277

SIPDIS

STATE FOR IIP/G/IR (CBORYS), NEA/P (ACASPER), NEA/PPD  
(JDAVIES), NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: OMAN: A SIX-CORNERED SULTANATE

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SUMMARY  
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1. The Ambassador, along with officials from the Ministry of Manpower and Muscat's Higher College of Technology, opened Oman's sixth American Corner on February 21, 2006, an event that generated excellent press coverage. The College's Dean used the event to announce his short-term goal of increasing the number of Government-sponsored Omanis studying in the U.S. from one at present to eighty to one hundred as soon as next year. End summary.

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HIGH TIME FOR A NEW CORNER  
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2. Speaking beneath a banner of American and Omani flags, and a commemorative plaque, the Ambassador noted that this inauguration was the culmination of a process begun in with the opening of the first American Corner in Oman in September 2004. Calling the Corner an "authoritative information bank," he expressed his hope that students and friends would take advantage of the books, computers, DVDs, and CD-ROMs to increase their understanding of American society. Dean of the Higher College Dr. Khalaf al-Tell expressed his appreciation to the Ambassador sponsoring the corner, as did Ministry of Manpower Director General Abdulhakim al-Ismaili.

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STUDENTS FOR HIGHER  
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3. Dean al-Tell's commitment to American-style education, his positive attitude towards the U.S., and the location of his school in the heart of the capital area bode well for Embassy efforts to increase the number of Omanis applying to American graduate schools and returning to make a positive contribution. The College's student body of 4,800 and its role as a hub for students from other area schools make it an ideal programming platform for Embassy cultural and informational events, beginning with a bluegrass musical concert planned for early March. The dean, himself a product of U.S. higher education, said that although only one student from the college is now in a U.S. graduate school, he aims to increase that number to between 80-100 applicants in the near future. He explained that his school's curriculum features credit hours rather than a British program. Beyond style of education, al-Tell said he admires American society, and remarked several times that religious fanatics have distorted the image of Islam, and are hampering progress in the Arab world. He views Arab interaction with the U.S. primarily in terms of cooperation rather than confrontation, and sees the American Corner as a key element in furthering U.S.-Omani links.

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MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS  
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4. The Corner opening received copious press coverage both the day of and the day after the event, in English and Arabic publications. All daily newspapers made use of an Embassy-provided press release which described Corners as "partnerships" to "provide accurate and authoritative information about the United States to the general public in Oman." The media also liberal quoted the Ambassador's speech. The English "Oman Observer" printed the press release verbatim, and the Arabic "Oman" included almost all of the Ambassador's speech. Al-Shabiba newspaper reported Dean al-Tell's comments commending American teaching methodology and academic freedom.

BALTIMORE